

# Eventive and Stative Passives: The Role of Transfer in the Acquisition of *ser* and *estar* by German and English L1 Speakers

Joyce Bruhn de Garavito  
The University of Western Ontario

Transfer is central to many of the debates on the acquisition of second languages (L2). A number of scholars argue that in fact the first language (L1) constitutes the initial state in L2 acquisition, although access to Universal Grammar (UG) is fully available (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994; 1996). For others, the L1 is the sole source of access to UG in adult acquisition and, as a consequence, it is impossible to change parameters (Bley-Vroman, 1990; Liceras and Díaz, 1999; Tsimpli and Roussou, 1991). Recently, it has been suggested that transfer is an important factor when dealing with interfaces, that is, areas in which modules of the grammar intersect other modules such as the syntax/pragmatics interface or syntax/semantics (Tsimpli et al., 2004). Finally, there seem to be areas in which transfer plays a very limited role, for example in the acquisition of gender (Bruhn de Garavito and White, 2002; White et al., 2004). The present paper will examine the role of transfer in the acquisition of eventive and stative passives in Spanish. These two types of passives are distinguished in Spanish by the presence of a different copula. In English, although the same distinction exists at an underlying level, there is no overt marking to distinguish between the two. In German, although we do not find the equivalent of the two Spanish verbs, the two passives are expressed by a different copula. If transfer at an underlying level is present, the prediction is that both German and English speakers should be able to acquire the Spanish passives, as both languages make the distinction. If, however, transfer, in order to function, needs some overt marker of the distinction, then German learners should outperform the English learners. Finally, if transfer plays no role, it is possible neither group will acquire the distinction.

## 1. Passives

The properties of verbal and adjectival passives were first described in a seminal paper by Wasow (1977). Wasow suggested that verbal passives are the result of a syntactic transformation, while adjectival passives are built in the lexicon. It is usually assumed that in a verbal passive the object cannot get case from the participle, so it needs to move to subject position (Baker et al., 1989). In the case of adjectival passives, the participle is transformed into an adjective, and this change of category explains most of the properties related to this structure (Levin and Rappaport, 1986).

Although most of the tests Wasow proposes for English to distinguish between the two types of passive do not apply straightforwardly in Spanish, it is clear that the distinction is instantiated in this language by way of two different copulas, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) El pollo estaba bien cocinado.  
the chicken was (*estar-imperfect*) well cooked  
'The chicken was well cooked.'
- (2) El pollo fue cocinado en un horno a carbón.  
the chicken was (*ser-preterite*) cooked in a coal stove  
'The chicken was cooked in a coal stove.'

---

\* This research was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada team grant, for which I am very grateful. I would like to thank Raquel Fernández-Fuertes from the Universidad de Valladolid and Victoria Patch from the University of Hamburg for their assistance in collecting the data.

As seen in (1) and (2), the use of *estar* expresses a state while the sentence in (2), with *ser*, is interpreted as an event. For this reason, I will refer to the distinction as stative vs. eventive passives, although there is general overlap with Wasow's original proposal (see Levin and Rappaport, 1986).

Although the Spanish passives have not merited much attention in the literature, there has been a lively debate about the two copulas (Clements, 1988; Delbecque, 1997; Falk, 1979; Fernández Leborans, 1995; Leonetti, 1994; 1999; Vaño-Cerdá, 1982). In the past few years many researchers have converged on the idea that the two verbs differ in aspectual features. Scholars differ, however, on whether the difference lies in the copulas themselves, or whether it is related to the type of predicate used. Luján (1981), Bosque (1990), and Varela (1992) argue that the predicate, either participle or adjective, carries a feature for perfectivity. Schmitt (1992) and Lema (1992) argue that the copula itself is marked for aspect. For Schmitt, *ser* is unmarked for aspect, while *estar* is equivalent to the result state of an accomplishment verb, that is, it is marked as perfective. I will adopt this last claim, but I add the suggestion that perhaps the participle is also marked for aspect, and the features of the copula and the participle must not clash. Under this interpretation, *estar* can only take participles, or indeed adjectives, that are marked as perfective.

Several properties fall out from the aspectual features of the two passives. In the first place, only eventive passives carry an implicit agent that can be expressed by means of a by-phrase (Varela, 1992). The resultant state, expressed with *estar*, cannot, as shown in (3a) and (3b). Sentence (3a) expresses the ongoing event of serving, while (3b) expresses the state that results from the action of serving having been carried out.

- (3) a. El té siempre es servido a las 4 (por un mesero inglés).  
the tea always is served at the 4 (by an English waiter)  
'Tea is always served at 4 (by an English waiter).'
- b. El té está servido en el comedor principal (\*por un mesero inglés)  
the tea is served in the dining room main (\*by an English waiter)  
'Tea is served in the main dining room )\*by an English waiter.'

Secondly, because the verbal passive expresses an event, the canonical tense in the past for this structure is the preterite (or the present perfect, preferred in some dialects) (4a). In contrast, the resultant state will generally appear in the imperfect (4b). Unlike (4b), in which the chicken was already in a state of having been prepared when the speaker arrived, in (4a) the preparing of the chicken is interpreted as an event taking place subsequent to the act of arrival. As is well known, in the relevant context both the preterite or the imperfect may be used. However, in the absence of a context, the tenses in (4) would be the natural ones to use in each case.

- (4) a. El pollo fue (\*era) preparado por Carmen cuando llegué a casa.  
'The chicken was-preterite (\*was-imperfect) prepared by Carmen when I got home.'
- b. El pollo estaba (\*estuvo) preparado cuando llegué a casa.  
'The chicken was-imperfect (\*was-preterite) prepared when I got home.'

It is well known that the subject of perfective predicates cannot be interpreted as generic (see Slabakova and Montrul, 2003). Given that it does not carry the feature [+perfective], only the subject of *ser* can be interpreted as a true generic, while the subject of *estar* can only be interpreted as particular or belonging to a closed set. This contrast is illustrated in (5).

- (5) a. Los bomberos son frecuentemente lastimados.  
the firemen are (*ser*) frequently hurt  
'Firemen (in general)/the firemen (specific group) are hurt frequently'
- b. Los bomberos están frecuentemente lastimados.  
the firemen are (*estar*) frequently hurt  
'\*Firemen (in general)/the firemen (specific group) are hurt frequently'

Finally, one of the few of Wasow's test that works in Spanish with some consistency is the addition of the prefix *-in* to the participle, which can be used as an indication that the participle has been turned into an adjective. As (6) shows, *-in* participles can only appear with *estar*.

- (6) El trabajo \*es/está inacabado.  
 the work \*is (*ser*)/(*estar*) un-finished  
 'The work is unfinished.'

The properties we have summarized here will be used in this study to investigate knowledge of the distinction between the passives by German and English L1 learners. As we have seen, English distinguishes the two passives, but uses the same copula for both. In German, we do not find two copulas with the widespread uses that Spanish *ser* and *estar* have. However, as in Spanish, the two passives in German select a different copular verb: *sein* 'to be' for state passives, *werden* 'get' or 'become' for the eventive passives (Abbot-Smith and Behrens, 2006; Kratzer, 2000), as illustrated in (7). According to Abbot-Smith and Behrens (2006, p. 999), 'the distinction between *sein*- and *werden*-passives is largely one of tense-aspect semantics, rather than syntactic complexity.' As we have seen, it has been argued that the distinction in Spanish is also aspectual in nature.

- (7) a. Der Reis war gekocht. (Abbot-Smith and Behrens, 2006)  
 the rice be-3<sup>rd</sup>-sg.Past cook-participle  
 'The rice was in a cooked state).  
 b. Der Reis wurde gekocht.  
 the rice become-erd-sg-Past cook-participle  
 'The rice went through a process of being cooked.'

Crucially, according to informants, only the subject of the eventive passive (7b) can be interpreted as generic. As in the *estar* sentences in Spanish, the subject of the stative passive (7a) is always specific.

## 2. The passives and acquisition

The first language acquisition of the passives in different languages received a great deal of attention, particularly in view of the debate on whether structures that involved movement were acquired later (Allen, 1996; Bever, 1970; Borer and Wexler, 1992; Demuth, 1990; De Villiers and De Villiers, 1973; Maratsos, 1974). In the case of Spanish, Pierce (1992) argued that the distinction was acquired late precisely because eventive passives involved A-chains, although an important factor was the low frequency in the input, due to the preference in Spanish for the impersonal passive with the clitic *se*. Silva-Corvalán and Montanari (2008) investigated the development of the two copulas in an early bilingual child, and found usage was closely tied to frequency in the input.

Interest in the passives has not spread to second language acquisition, although acquisition of the copular verbs has been the subject of intense scholarship. VanPatten (1985; 1987) concluded that learners go through at least five stages in the acquisition of the copulas: omission (stage 1); almost exclusive use of *ser* (stage 2); use of *estar* to form the present progressive (stage 3); *estar* used to express location (stage 4) and *estar* with some adjectives (stage 5). Similar, although not identical, stages have been found in other studies (Briscoe, 1995; Ramírez-Gelpi, 1995; Ryan and Lafford, 1992).

Following work by Silva-Corvalán (1986), Geeslin (2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2005; see also Geeslin and Guijarro-Fuentes, 2006) has shown that many factors are involved in the choice of copula with adjectival predicates, not only in the case of second language learners but also for early bilinguals, in both Spanish and Portuguese. The general tendency seems to be for the uses of *estar* to be extended, while *ser* is used in fewer contexts.

Bruhn de Garavito and Valenzuela (2006; 2008) looked at knowledge of the passives. The data obtained in that study will be compared with the German learners of the present study. To summarize, they found that L2 learners who were native speakers of English differed significantly from native speakers, particularly in the interpretation of the subject as generic or specific.

### 3. The study

#### 3.1. Participants

The monolingual comparison group was made up of 10 native speakers of Spanish. They came from Colombia, Perú, Argentina and Mexico. Their length of stay in Canada ranged from a few months to 14 years. Three said they learned English at school, while the others had studied it as a subject but never used it to communicate until they arrived. Impressionistically their English was at the intermediate level or below.

The English L1 group was made up of 21 speakers who reported having been exposed to Spanish for the first time at the age of 12 or above. Of these, 4 were living in Spain at the time of testing, and the rest were students at a Canadian university where they had studied Spanish in a formal classroom but were currently enrolled in literature and culture courses, both at the undergraduate and the graduate levels. They had traveled to a Spanish-speaking country for a period ranging from 2 months to 2 years.

The German L1 group was made up of 9 speakers who also reported having been exposed to Spanish for the first time after the age of 12 or above. They were taking Spanish as a foreign language and culture courses at the university level, with the exception of one who was a lecturer. They differed from the English L1 group in that all were living in Spain at the time of testing. The proficiency level of both L2 groups was established by a placement test, which showed all were at an advanced level or higher.

#### 3.2. Methodology

The main tasks consisted of a Grammaticality Judgment Task and a Sentence Selection Task.

##### 3.2.1. Grammaticality Judgment Task

The Grammaticality Judgment Task was made up of 70 sentences, 40 grammatical and 30 ungrammatical. Where possible the contrast between grammaticality and ungrammaticality was made with minimal pairs. Judgments were made on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was a judgment of ‘totally unacceptable’ and 5 a judgment of ‘totally acceptable’.

The first contrast tested knowledge of the copulas with an adjective. The adjectives were chosen among those that only allow either *ser* or *estar* but not both. There were 10 sentences with *ser*, 5 grammatical and 5 ungrammatical, and 10 with *estar*, 5 grammatical and 5 ungrammatical. The objective of these sentences was to establish whether the speakers showed a basic understanding of the difference between the two copulas in the presence of adjectival predicates. Examples are given in (8) and (9).

- (8) a. *ser + adjective, grammatical*  
 El perro es leal.  
 the dog is loyal  
 ‘The dog is loyal.’
- b. *ser + adjective, ungrammatical*  
 \*Los policías son diponibles.  
 the policemen are available  
 ‘The policemen are available.’
- (9) a. *estar + adjective, grammatical*  
 Los policías están disponibles.  
 the policemen are available  
 ‘The policemen are available.’

b. *estar + adjective, ungrammatical*

\*El gato de Luisa está leal.

the cat of Luisa is loyal

‘Luisa’s cat is loyal.’

The second group of sentences focused on the two passives with and without agents. First, there were 10 sentences without an explicit agent (10), 5 with *ser* and 5 with *estar*. These were all grammatical and were included to ascertain that the learners did in fact accept participles with both copulas. They were contrasted with 10 sentences in which the agent was expressed with a *by*-phrase (11). Recall that the 5 sentences with *ser* would be grammatical while the 5 with *estar* would be ungrammatical.

(10) a. *Eventive passive (ser), no agent expressed, grammatical*

En el consulado los documentos son entregados durante las horas de oficina.

in the consulate the documents are handed in during the hours of office

‘In the consulate documents are handed in during office hours.’

b. *Stative passive (estar), no agent expressed, grammatical*

La cena ya está preparada para la fiesta.

the dinner already is prepared for the party

‘The dinner is already prepared for the party.’

(11) a. *Eventive passive (ser), agent, grammatical*

En el consulado los documentos son entregados por la secretaria.

in the consulate the documents are handed in by the secretary

‘In the consulate documents are handed in by the secretary.’

b. *Stative passive (estar), agent, ungrammatical*

\*La cena ya está preparada por un cocinero profesional.

the dinner already is prepared by a cook professional

‘The dinner is already prepared by a professional cook.’

The third contrast looked at the canonical past tense used for each of the passives. Recall that in this case it is not a question of grammaticality, the more natural option is for states in the past to be expressed with the imperfect and events with the preterite. There were 10 eventive passives (12), five in the imperfect and five in the preterite, and 10 statives (13), again with both aspects.

(12) a. *Eventive passives, preterite, preferred*

El libro fue escrito en Inglaterra.

the book was-preterite written in England

‘The book was written in England.’

b. *Eventive passives, imperfect, dispreferred*

#El libro era escrito en inglés.

the book was-imperfect written in English

‘The book was written in English.’

(13) a. *Stative passives, preterite, dispreferred*

#Ayer la comida estuvo servida en la mesa.

yesterday the dinner was-preterite served on the table

‘Yesterday the dinner was served on the table.’

b. *Stative passives, imperfect, preferred*

Ayer la comida estaba servida en la mesa.

yesterday the dinner was-imperfect served on the table

‘Yesterday the dinner was served on the table.’

The final contrast was between participles with the prefix *-in*, which commonly appear only in statives. There were 10 sentences in this type, 5 with *ser* and 5 with *estar* (14).

- (14) a. *Eventive passives (ser), participle with prefix -in, ungrammatical.*  
 \*El cuadro es inacabado.  
 the painting is unfinished  
 ‘The painting is unfinished.’
- b. *Stative passives (estar), participle with prefix -in, grammatical*  
 El cuadro está inacabado.  
 the painting is unfinished  
 ‘The painting is unfinished.’

### 3.2.2. Sentence Selection Task

The purpose of the GJT was to see whether speakers distinguished between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences with the copulas. However, this task does not tell us anything about the interpretation of the subject by the two groups. To find out whether the speakers recognized that only the subject of *ser* can be interpreted as generic a Sentence Selection Task was included. As with the Grammaticality Judgment Task, a comparison was made between the passives and the two copulas with adjectival predicates. The task consisted of short scenarios followed by 4 options from which the participants had to choose: a sentence with the verb *ser*, a sentence with the verb *estar*, rejection of both, or acceptance of both. In total there were 40 scenarios, 22 of which tested the interpretation of the subject, with 18 distracters. All of the crucial sentences in this task used the present to insure that judgments were based on the type of copula and not on the tense of the verb. For 11 of the scenarios the only choice possible was the *ser* sentence because the scenario set up a situation in which the subject of the given sentence had to be interpreted as generic. In 6 of these the copula was followed by an adjective (15), the other five were passives (16). In the other 11 cases the scenario set up a situation in which the interpretation of the sentence was stative and the interpretation of the subject was specific, so the natural choice would be the verb *estar*. Of these sentences, 6 included an adjective (17) and 5 a participle (18).

- (15) *copula + adjective, generic interpretation of the subject, ser*  
 Enrique y Paquita están hablando de deportes. Enrique dice que le gustan todos los deportes menos el fútbol. Paquita está sorprendida y le pregunta por qué. Enrique dice:  
 a. Los fanáticos del fútbol son violentos.  
 b. Los fanáticos del fútbol están violentos.  
 c. Ni a ni b  
 d. Ambas, a y b
- Enrique and Paquita are talking about sports. Enrique says he likes all sports except football (soccer). Paquita is surprised and asks why. Enrique says:  
 a. Football fans are (ser) violent.  
 b. Football fans are (estar) violent.  
 c. Neither a nor b.  
 d. Both a and b.
- (16) *Copula + participle, generic interpretation of the subject, ser*  
 Patricia pidió una taza de té a la inglesa. No quiso tomárselo. Patricia dijo:  
 a. En Inglaterra el té es servido sin azúcar.  
 b. En Inglaterra el té está servido sin azúcar.  
 c. Ni a ni b  
 d. Ambas, a y b

Patricia asked for a cup of tea English style. She wouldn't drink it. Patricia said:

a. In England tea is served without sugar.

- (17) *copula + adjective, non-generic interpretation of the subject, estar*  
 Luisa y Guillermo están en el partido final del campeonato de fútbol en el que juega su equipo favorito. Suelen ir a todos los partidos pero hoy Luisa no lo está pasando bien porque ...
- Los fanáticos son violentos.
  - Los fanáticos están violentos.
  - Ni a ni b
  - Ambas, *a y b*

Luisa and Guillermo are in the final game of the football championship in which their favorite team is playing. They usually go to all the games but today Luisa is not having a good time because...

a. The fans are violent.

- (18) *copula + participle, non-generic interpretation of the subject, estar*  
 Lucía está muy enojada. Esperaba una buena taza de café al llegar a casa. Lucía dijo:
- ¿Por qué no es servido el café?
  - ¿Por qué no está servido el café?
  - Ni *a* ni *b*
  - Ambas, *a y b*

Lucía is very angry. She expected a good cup of coffee when she got home. Lucía said:

a. ¿Why isn't the coffee served?

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Grammaticality Judgment Task

The overall means for the different groups on grammatical and ungrammatical sentences are presented in Table 1. An ANOVA repeated measures shows no significant difference by group ( $F(2, 37)=.789, p=.46$ ), a significant difference by sentence type ( $F(13, 481)=32.67, p=.0001$ ) and a significant interaction ( $F(26, 481)=4.356, p=.0001$ ). As Table 1 shows, the native speakers and the English L1 speakers clearly distinguish grammaticality with both copulas. Although the responses of the German speakers are in the right direction, they fail to show a significant difference between their responses to the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. I believe this is due to the low number of participants.

Table 1: General mean responses on target *ser* and *estar* sentences (GJT)

Target	Status	Spanish L1 (n=10)	English L1 (n=21)	German L1 (n=9)
<i>ser</i>	Gram.	4.55****	3.781****	3.5
	(SD)	(.683)	(.711)	(.706)
	Ungram.	2.01	2.401	2.96
	(SD)	(.715)	(.69)	(.561)
<i>estar</i>	Gram.	4.29****	4.037****	3.39
	(SD)	(.473)	(.849)	(.826)
	Ungram	2.18	2.848	2.69
	(SD)	(.538)	(.745)	(.926)

\*\*\*\*  $p<.0001$

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the mean responses for each sentence type on the grammaticality judgment task.

Table 2: Mean responses on specific types of *ser* and *estar* sentences (GJT)

Target	Status	Spanish L1 (n=10)	English L1 (n=21)	German L1 (n=9)
<i>Ser adj.</i>	Gram.	4.78	4.77	4.37
<i>Ser adj.</i>	Ungram.	1.64	1.98	3.39
<i>Estar adj.</i>	Gram.	4.74	4.67	4.06
<i>Estar adj.</i>	Ungram	1.5	2.1	2.34
<b>Passives</b>				
<i>Ser-ag.</i>	Gram.	4.62	2.914	2.7
<i>Ser+ag.</i>	Gram.	4.0	3.32	3.31
<i>Estar-ag.</i>	Gram.	3.96	4.0	3.58
<i>Estar+ag.</i>	Ungram.	2.2	3.43	3.10
<i>Ser+pref.</i>	Ungram.	2.08	3.06	2.73
<i>Estar+pref.</i>	Gram.	4.1	4.07	3.07
<i>Ser pret.</i>	Gram.	4.26	4.11	3.61
<i>Ser imp.</i>	#	2.32	2.16	2.78
<i>Estar pret.</i>	#	2.84	3.0	2.61
<i>Estar imp.</i>	Gram.	4.36	3.45	2.88

As seen in Table 2 the native speakers performed as expected. The English L1 speakers are surprisingly good at distinguishing the copulas with adjectives. They are not equally consistent in the case of the passives. In the first place, they reject the eventive passives with and without an agent to a certain degree. This is to be expected. The passive with *ser*, as indicated above, is dispreferred by native speakers, and second language learners, who tend to overuse it, are often corrected. This L2 group only weakly rejects *estar* with an agent. They also exhibit weak rejection of the *ser* passives when the participle has a prefix which has clearly turned it into an adjective, although their acceptance of the correct form with *estar* is much higher. Finally, they do not clearly distinguish the canonical aspect of *estar*, although they do for *ser*.

The German L1 speakers are not as good as the English speakers in the case of adjectives with *ser*, although their judgments are in the right direction. Turning to their responses for the passives, they also reject the passive with *ser*, probably for the same reason as the English speakers. Like the English speakers, they also accept the ungrammatical use of the *estar* passive with an agent. They are also similar to them on the prefixed participles, and like them they are also better at the canonical aspect of the eventive passives than at the aspect of the statives. Overall then, the German group is not clearly different in any respect from the English L1 speakers.

#### 4.2. Sentence Selection Task

Table 3: General mean responses on target *ser* and *estar* sentences (SST)

Target	Status	Spanish L1 (n=10)	English L1 (n=21)	German L1 (n=9)
<i>Passives:</i> <i>generic</i>	<i>ser</i> (G)	89%	<b>46.1%</b>	<b>49.4%</b>
<i>Passives:</i> <i>non-generic.</i>	<i>estar</i> (G)	86.7%	83.81%	88.89
<i>Adjectives:</i> <i>generic</i>	<i>ser</i> (G)	82.52%	85%	74.05
<i>Adjectives:</i> <i>non-generic</i>	<i>estar</i> (G)	71.41%	66.7	62.2

On the Sentence Selection Task all three groups are quite similar when the predicate is an adjective, although the German group recognizes the interpretation of the subject of *ser* as generic to a lower degree than the other two groups. That is, all three groups correctly choose the *ser* option when the story forces a generic interpretation of the subject. What is startling is that, when the sentence is an eventive passive, neither of the two L2 groups is able to recognize that only the subject of *ser* can be interpreted as generic, choosing the impossible *estar* sentences instead. The responses of both groups are close to random. We will now turn to a discussion of these results.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper looked at knowledge of the properties of Spanish passives in two groups of adult learners, one whose L1 was English and one whose L1 was German. We were interested in seeing how transfer would play itself out. Recall that English distinguishes between the two passives, but there is no overt marking on the verb or the participle to distinguish the two structures. German, on the other hand, clearly distinguishes between the two by the use of copula used, although in other areas the two German copulas do not have the same distribution as they do in Spanish. In other words, assuming transfer is present, the learning task for both L2 groups was to notice that in Spanish the two passive constructions are distinguished by the use of different copular verbs. Once this is accomplished, recognizing the properties of the passives should fall out naturally. Under this scenario we should find that at the initial stage, for both the L1 German and the L1 English speakers, the two passives form part of the learners' L2 grammar. It is possible, however, that having the distinction overtly marked in the L1 could facilitate the learners' noticing it in the L2. That is, because German makes the distinction overtly it is possible that the German learners could more easily acquire the correlation between the two copulas and the type of passive. However, both groups should find the distinction between the copulas with adjectives more difficult, as neither L1 distinguishes between adjectives in the same way Spanish does (but see Diesing, 1990). The prediction is, therefore, that both groups should find the choice of copula with adjectives quite difficult, but that the German group should have the advantage in the case of the passives. This is particularly so in the case of the interpretation of the subject, which works in identical fashion in German.

Results show that these predictions were not realized. Both groups did relatively well when the predicate was an adjective. Furthermore, both groups did well on some, although not all, the properties of the passives. This may be consistent with the Full Transfer hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994; 1996). However, when it came to the interpretation of the subject we were faced with a surprising result. The two groups clearly understood that only the subject of *ser* could be interpreted as generic when the predicate was an adjective, but both groups failed to do so for the passives. The reasons for this are not clear (see Bruhn de Garavito and Valenzuela, 2008 for a discussion). What is of interest to us here is to point out that the German speakers did not provide any evidence of having transferred a property of their first language to the Spanish interlanguage. It is important to underline that the German group was quite small, and therefore it is possible that different results will show up when a larger group is examined.

The argument I would like to put forward here is that these results provide evidence against the Full Transfer hypothesis. White (2003, p. 67) argues that failure to show L1 effects cannot be taken as counter-evidence, 'since Full Transfer Full Access crucially assumes that the interlanguage grammar will be restructured in response to properties of the L2 input interacting with UG.' This seems clear if the L1 and the L2 have different settings. However, if the L1 and the L2 coincide in a certain property and yet the interlanguage does not exhibit this property at a certain point in time, under the Full Transfer account we would have to assume that for some reason the interaction of the L2 and the L1 led the learner to change the initial correct position to an incorrect one found in neither the L1 nor the L2. In the case in point, the speakers' L1, German, only allows a generic interpretation of the subject of an eventive passive. The speakers in the test seem to distinguish to a certain extent between the two passives in Spanish, their responses usually are in the right direction. And yet they are abysmal at distinguishing the one property that is the same in their L1. Are we to assume that in the initial stages they would have been able to do so, and then they lost the ability? I think not. It seems more sensible to assume that transfer is selective, in the sense of Andersen (1983). In other words, transfer is only

possible when the interlanguage has reached a certain point, and for these learners it has not reached that point.

The history of transfer has swung between extremes for some time now. According to proponents of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1983; Stockwell et al., 1965) areas of difficulty in the acquisition of a second language could be predicted by comparing the L1 and the L2, because the cause of any problems was always the L1. With the advent of the Creative Construction Hypothesis (Dulay et al., 1982) the pendulum swung in the other direction and transfer from the L1 was not considered an important factor in L2 acquisition. As often happens, other scholars aimed for the middle ground. For example, Andersen (1983) and Zobl (1980), among others, suggested that transfer is crucial, but it is constrained by the natural developmental path of the learning process.

Within theories that examine the role of Universal Grammar in second language acquisition a similar pattern can be found. According to Epstein et al (1996) transfer does not play a significant role in the acquisition of second languages. In contrast, for proponents of Full Transfer, with or without Full Access (Hawkins and Chan, 1997; Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994; 1996; among others), the final state of the L1 is the initial state of the L2, in other words, everything transfers. Against this position Pienemann (1998; Pienemann et al., 2005) has argued that transfer is only possible when processing is sufficiently advanced to permit transfer to take place. Like Zobl and Andersen, Pienemann argues that transfer is developmentally constrained. He claims that ‘L2 learners can produce only those linguistic forms for which they have acquired the necessary processing prerequisites’ (2005, p. 91).

It is not clear, however, what Pienemann’s approach tells us about the mental representation of the grammar. It could be, for example, that the initial state is the L1, but that learners cannot adequately use this representation until processing has ‘caught up’. This is so because Pienemann’s theory seems to be a theory about use (note the word ‘production’ in the quote above), and I think it is imperative for researchers to separate processing from mental representation. These two levels interact with or feed off of each other (Carroll, 1999), but it is doubtful whether they obey the same principles and constraints. The question that arises is what the initial state of L2 acquisition is if it is not the structure of the L1. Following Epstein et al (1996) I would like to suggest it is not different from the initial stage of L1 acquisition. However, unlike Epstein et al I would argue that the L1 provides input to the L2 interlanguage, in the same way as the L2 speech encountered by the learner in the environment does. However, it can only do so when the L2 has reached a stage where it is possible for transfer to take place, perhaps when a certain level of processing has been reached.

## References

- Abbot-Smith, K. and Behrens, H. (2006). How known constructions influence the acquisition of other constructions: The German passive and future constructions. *Cognitive Science* 30, 995-1026.
- Allen, S. E. M. (1996). *Aspects of Argument Structure Acquisition in Inuktitut*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Andersen, R. W. (1983). Transfer to somewhere. In S. Gass and L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language Transfer in Language Learning* (pp. 177-201). Rowley, MA, Newbury House Publishers.
- Baker, M. C., Johnson, K. & Roberts, I. (1989). Passive arguments raised. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 20, 219-251.
- Bever, T. G. (1970). The cognitive bases for linguistic structures. In J. R. Hayes (Ed.), *Cognition and the Development of Language* (279-362). New York: Wiley.
- Bley-Vroman, R. (1990). The logical problem of foreign language learning. *Linguistic Analysis*, 20, 3-49.
- Borer, H. and Wexler, K. (1992). Bi-unique relations and the maturation of grammatical principles. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 10, 147-189.
- Bosque, I. (1990). Sobre el aspecto en los adjetivos y en los participios. In I. Bosque (Ed.), *Tiempo y aspecto en español* (pp. 177-211). Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra.
- Briscoe, G. G. (1995). *The acquisition of ser and estar by non-native speakers of Spanish*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
- Bruhn de Garavito, J. & Valenzuela, E. (2006). The status of Ser and Estar in late and early bilingual L2 Spanish. In C. A. Klee and T. L. Face (Eds.), *Selected Proceedings of the 7th Conference on the Acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as First and Second Languages* (pp. 100-109). Somerville, Cascadilla Press.
- Bruhn de Garavito, J. & Valenzuela, E. (2008). Eventive and stative passives in Spanish L2 acquisition: a matter of aspect. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition. Special Issue*, Guijarro-Fuentes, P. and Geeslin, K (Eds.), 11, 323-336.

- Bruhn de Garavito, J. & White, L. (2002). L2 acquisition of Spanish DPs: The status of grammatical features. In A.T. Pérez-Leroux and J. Liceras (Eds.), *The Acquisition of Spanish Morphosyntax: The L1/L2 Connection* (pp. 151-176). Dordrecht, Kluwer.
- Carroll, S. E. (1999). Putting 'input' in its proper place. *Second Language Research*, 15, 337-388.
- Clements, J. C. (1988). The semantics and pragmatics of the Spanish <copula + adjective> construction. *Linguistics* 26, 779-822.
- De Villiers, J. G. and P. A. De Villiers (1973). Development of the use of word order in comprehension. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 2, 331-341.
- Delbecque, N. (1997). The Spanish copulas *ser* and *estar*. In M. Verspoor, K. D. Lee and E. Sweetser (Eds.), *Lexical and Syntactical Construction and the Construction of Meaning* (247-270). Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Demuth, K. (1990). Subject, topic and the Sesotho passive. *Journal of Child Language*, 17, 67-84.
- Diesing, M. (1990). *The syntactic roots of semantic partition*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts.
- Dulay, H., Burt, M. & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language Two*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Epstein, S. D., Flynn, S. & Martohardjono, G. (1996). Second language acquisition: Theoretical and experimental issues in contemporary research. *Brain and Behavioural Sciences*, 19, 677-758.
- Falk, J. (1979). *Ser y estar con atributos adjetivales*. Uppsala, Alqvist and Wiksell.
- Fernández Leborans, M. J. (1995). Las construcciones con el verbo *estar*: aspectos sintácticos y semánticos. *Verba*, 22, 253-284.
- Fernández Leborans, M. J. (1999). La predicación: Las oraciones copulativas. In I. Bosque and V. Demonte (Eds.), *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua Española* (pp. 2354-2460). Madrid, Espasa.
- Geeslin, K. L. (2001). Changing norms, moving targets and the SLA of copula choice. *Spanish Applied Linguistics*, 5, 29-55.
- Geeslin, K. L. (2002). Semantic transparency as a predictor of copula choice in second language acquisition. *Linguistics*, 40, 439-468.
- Geeslin, K. L. (2002). The second language acquisition of Spanish copula choice and its relationship to language change. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 24, 419-451.
- Geeslin, K. L. (2003). A comparison of copula choice in advanced and native Spanish. *Language Learning*, 53, 703-764.
- Geeslin, K. L. (2005). *Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries to Improve the Analysis of Second Language Data: A Study of Copula Choice with Adjectives in Spanish*. Munich, LINCOM Publishers.
- Geeslin, K. L. & Guijarro-Fuentes, P. (2006). Second language acquisition of variable structures in Spanish by Portuguese speakers. *Language Learning*, 56, 53-107.
- Hawkins, R. & Chan, Y.-h. C. (1997). The partial availability of Universal Grammar in second language acquisition: the 'failed functional features hypothesis'. *Second Language Research*, 13, 187-226.
- Kratzer, A. (2000). Building Statives. In L. J. Conathan (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 26th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (pp. 385-399). Berkeley.
- Lado, R. (1983). Excerpts from "Linguistics across cultures". In S. Gass and L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language Transfer in Language Learning* (pp. 21-31). Rowley, MA, Newbury House Publishers.
- Lema, J. (1992). Distinguishing copular and aspectual auxiliaries: Spanish *ser* and *estar*. In J. Amastae, G. Goodall, M. Montalbetti and M. Phinney (Eds.), *Contemporary Research in Romance Linguistics* (pp. 257-274). Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Leonetti, M. (1994). *Ser y estar: estado de la cuestión*. *Barataria* (pp. 182-205), Universidad de Alcalá de Henares 1.
- Levin, B. & Rappaport, M. (1986). The formation of adjectival passives. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 17, 623-661.
- Liceras, J. M. & Díaz, L. (1999). Topic-drop versus pro-drop: null subjects and pronominal subjects in the Spanish L2 of Chinese, English, French, German and Japanese speakers. *Second Language Research*, 15, 1-77.
- Luján, M. (1981). The Spanish copulas as aspectual indicators. *Lingua*, 54, 165-210.
- Maratsos, M. P. (1974). Children who get worse at understanding the passive: A replication of Bever. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 3, 65-74.
- Pienemann, M. (1998). *Language Processing and Second Language Development*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Pienemann, M., Di Biase, B., Kawaguchi, S. & Håkansson, G. (2005). Processability, typological distance and L1 transfer. In M. Pienemann (Ed.), *Cross-Linguistic Aspects of Processability Theory* (pp. 85-116). Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

- Pierce, A. E. (1992). The acquisition of passives in Spanish and the question of A-Chain maturation. *Language Acquisition*, 2, 55-81.
- Ramírez-Gelpi, A. (1995). *The Acquisition of Ser and Estar among Adult Native English Speakers learning Spanish as a Second Language*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.
- Ryan, J. & Lafford, B. (1992). The acquisition of lexical meaning in a study abroad environment. *Hispania*, 75, 714-722.
- Schmitt, C. (1992). *Ser and estar: a matter of aspect. Proceedings of NELS*, 22, 411-425.
- Schwartz, B. & Sprouse, R. (1994). Word order and nominative case in nonnative language acquisition: a longitudinal study of L1 Turkish German interlanguage. In T. Hoekstra and B. Schwartz (Eds.), *Language Acquisition Studies in Generative Grammar* (pp. 317-368). Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Schwartz, B. D. & Sprouse, R. (1996). L2 cognitive states and the Full Transfer/Full Access model. *Second Language Research*, 12, 40-72.
- Silva-Corvalán, C. (1986). Bilingualism and language change: The extension of *estar* in Los Angeles Spanish. *Language*, 62, 587-608.
- Silva-Corvalán, C. & Montanari, S. (2008). The acquisition of *ser, estar* (and be) by a Spanish-English bilingual child: the early age. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition. Language Acquisition, Bilingualism and Copula Choice in Spanish, special issue*, P. Guijarro-Fuentes & K. Geeslin (Eds.), 11, 341-360.
- Slabakova, R. & Montrul, S. (2003). Genericity and aspect in L2 acquisition. *Language Acquisition*, 11, 165-196.
- Stockwell, R. P., Bowen, J. D. & Martin, J. (1965). *The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Tsimpli, I.-M. & Roussou, A. (1991). Parameter resetting in L2? *University College London Working Papers in Linguistics*, 3, 149-169.
- Tsimpli, I.-M., Sorace, A., Heacock, C. & Filiaci, F. (2004). First language attrition and syntactic subjects: A study of Greek and Italian near-native speakers of English. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 8, 257-277.
- Vañó-Cerdá, A. (1982). *Ser y Estar + Adjetivos. Un estudio sincrónico y diacrónico*. Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag.
- VanPatten, B. (1985). The acquisition of *ser* and *estar* in adult second language learners: A preliminary investigation of transitional stages of competence. *Hispania*, 68, 399-406.
- VanPatten, B. (1987). The acquisition of *ser* and *estar*. Accounting for developmental patterns. In B. VanPatten, T. Dvorak and J. Lee (Eds.), *Foreign language learning: A research perspective* (pp. 61-75). Rowley, MA, Newbury House.
- Varela, S. (1992). Verbal and adjectival participles in Spanish. In C. Laeufer and T. A. Morgan (eds.), *Theoretical Analyses in Romance Linguistics* (pp. 219-234). Amsterdam, John Benjamin.
- Wasow, T. (1977). Transformations and the Lexicon. In P. Culicover, T. Wasow and A. Akmajian (Eds.), *Formal Syntax* (pp. 327-360). New York, Academic Press.
- White, L. (2003). *Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press.
- White, L., Valenzuela, E., Kozłowska-Macgregor, M. & Leung, Y-K. I. (2004). Gender and number agreement in nonnative Spanish. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 25, 105-133.
- Zobl, H. (1980). The formal and developmental selectivity of L1 influence on L2 acquisition. *Language Learning*, 30, 43-57.

# Selected Proceedings of the 11th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium

edited by Joseph Collentine,  
Maryellen García, Barbara Lafford,  
and Francisco Marcos Marín

Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2009

## Copyright information

Selected Proceedings of the 11th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium  
© 2009 Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville, MA. All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-57473-432-4 library binding

A copyright notice for each paper is located at the bottom of the first page of the paper.  
Reprints for course packs can be authorized by Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

## Ordering information

Orders for the library binding edition are handled by Cascadilla Press.  
To place an order, go to [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com) or contact:

Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA 02144, USA  
phone: 1-617-776-2370, fax: 1-617-776-2271, e-mail: [sales@cascadilla.com](mailto:sales@cascadilla.com)

## Web access and citation information

This entire proceedings can also be viewed on the web at [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com). Each paper has a unique document # which can be added to citations to facilitate access. The document # should not replace the full citation.

This paper can be cited as:

Bruhn de Garavito, Joyce. 2009. Eventive and Stative Passives: The Role of Transfer in the Acquisition of *ser* and *estar* by German and English L1 Speakers. In *Selected Proceedings of the 11th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium*, ed. Joseph Collentine et al., 27-38. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

or:

Bruhn de Garavito, Joyce. 2009. Eventive and Stative Passives: The Role of Transfer in the Acquisition of *ser* and *estar* by German and English L1 Speakers. In *Selected Proceedings of the 11th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium*, ed. Joseph Collentine et al., 27-38. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com), document #2200.